

CELTIC KNOTS



"Knowledge Tied Together For Your Reading Pleasure"

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Concord Grove #155

On my weekly walks in San Francisco I like to explore little alleyways looking for unique bars and restaurants. On one of the small narrow streets I explored, "Commercial St.," near Jackson Square, I found a bar and restaurant named "Sydney Town Tavern." I asked the bartender if the name had any connection to Sydney, Australia. She said "indirectly." I took what she told me and did some research. I found some history about San Francisco that not many people know.

Back in the Barbary Coast Days / Gold Rush (1849 - 1851) prisoners and criminals from Australia were shipped here to work in the gold fields. Once they realized that this hard work sucks, they returned to San Francisco where a life of crime was a bit more lucrative and there was little risk of punishment. They became known as the "Sydney Ducks."

The area known as "Sydney Town" bounded by Montgomery, Broadway, Stockton and Washington Streets was lawless. Police refused to go in there. If shop owners didn't pay for protection their store burned to the ground that night. There were brothels, casinos, dance halls and bars just to name a few places where a man might find himself beaten, robbed, drugged and even Shanghaied. In fact, this is where the word Shanghaied was coined.

Finally the citizens got fed up with the crime and corruption and formed vigilante committees. Their first act was to catch two leaders of the Sydney Ducks, had a quick trial and hung them in the square five hours after they captured them. Some of the Ducks found themselves Shanghaied and on a ship back to Australia. It took only about two weeks to clean up the area. The entire city of San Francisco functioned as a law abiding city for a while.

For more on this history, Google "Sydney Ducks and vigilante justice in San Francisco," "Barbary Coast, San Francisco" or "Sydney Town San Francisco."

I hope you have enjoyed this piece of San Francisco history.